GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
AGRICULTURE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2416
ANSWERED ON:03.12.2007
INFORMATION ON GM FOODCROPS
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Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether as per the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), countries who have approved the use of genetically modified crops should share information to reduce risks of disruption to the global food trade;

(b) if so, the details in this regard;

(c) whether any guidelines have been issued by FAO in this regard;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the reaction of the Government in this regard?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA)

(a) to (e): According to the FAO, information sharing concerning food safety assessments of foods derived from biotechnology was recently discussed at the Seventh Session of the Codex ad hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (held in Chiba, Japan, 24-28 September, 2007). Subject to the final approval of Codex Alimentarius Commission, Task Force proposed that FAO maintain a publicity accessible central data base containing relevant information to food safety assessments of recombinant −D.N.A. plants, utilizing the existing International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health. It was agreed that Codex Members should make information available to this database, which will facilitate rapid access by importing Codex Members to additional information relevant to the assessment of food safety assessment in situations of low-level presence of recombinant-DNA plant material in foods. Copy of the guidelines in this regard is in the Annexure.

According to the WTO regulation any country introducing standards for a new category of food or modifying any parameter in the food is required to intimate to the WTO, which can be accessed by any country notified by the WTO. Furthermore, detailed information on the rationale of such notification could be obtained from the country introducing the regulation through the SPS enquiry point. Every country has got its sovereign right to ensure safety of food in order to protect health of its consumers. Therefore the safety evaluation of the GM food is given due consideration before considering the trade implications.

Annexure

To: Members of FAO, Codex member countries and observer organizations, other interested parties.

From:`System Manager
International Portal on Food Safety, Plant and Animal Health
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy.

Subject:- Request for the provision of information to the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health: Food safety assessments of recombinant − DNA plants.

Background

The Seventh Session of the Codex ad hoc Interogovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (Chiba, Japan, 24-28 September, 2007) considered the Proposed Draft Annex: Food Safety Assessment in Situations of Low-level Presence of Recombinant-DNA Plant Material in Food, Section 3 of the Proposed Draft Annex provides for data and information sharing on recombinant-DNA plants authorized in accordance with the Codex Plant Guideline.

In this connection FAO proposed a database and data entry mechanism designed to facilitate the publication of food safety assessment information, as detailed in the Proposed Draft Annex. Through the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH − www.ipfsaph.org), FAO will maintain a publicly accessible central database containing relevant information to food safety assessments of recombinant-DNA plants.

In view of the possible adoption of the above annex by the 31st Session of the Commission, the FAO/IPFSAPH Secretariat has already initiated finalization of this database and would like to inform Members of FAO, as well as other interested parties, of the modalities of providing relevant information, as noted in paragraph 80 of the Report of the Task Force (ALINORM 08/31/34), and invite their cooperation.

Process to complete database construction

Four tasks are envisaged to complete this work:

1. Initial manual data entry by FAO/IPFSAPH Secretariat of all existing food safety assessment of recombinant-DNA plants in food (expected to be completed by end November 2007);

2. Request by FAO/IPFSAPH for confirmation by Members of FAO of the accuracy of the food safety assessment data relating to their country as entered in the database;

3. Once national data has been checked and approved the database will be made publicly accessible.

Please note that relevant Members of FAO shall be notified of the timing and details of task 2 at a later date, once task 1 has been completed by FAO/IPFSAPH.

4. Following publication of the data, all new food safety assessments of recombinant- DNA plants in food should be made available to FAO/IPFSAPH for entry into the database.

Provision of food safety assessments of recombinant-DNA plants

Once the database is in production and publicly accessible, Members of FAO and other interested parties will be requested to provide information concerning new and revised food safety assessments to FAO/IPFSAPH via the email account IPFSAPH-Safety-Assessment@fao.org, containing the following information:

A URL link to the location of the food safety assessment (FTP or HTTP), or provision of the food safety assessment as a file attachment (PDF or DOC format);

Full contact details of the competent authority (ies) responsible for the food safety assessment, and of the product applicant;

URL links to information on the same product in other databases maintained by relevant international organizations, as appropriate;

Details on where detection method protocols and appropriate reference material (non-viable, or in certain circumstances, viable) suitable for low-level situation may be obtained, as appropriate.

In the meantime, Members of FAO and other interested parties are encouraged to nominate contact point (s) regarding food safety assessments of recombinant-DNA plants and submit their email address (es). Those wishing to submit email contact details are kindly requested to send them to IPFSAPH-Safety-Assessment@fao.org . This will help facilitate the alerting of new information both to and from FAO/IPFSAPH.

If required further information and clarification on the above can be obtained directly from the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health via;

Mr. Julius Jackson
System Manager
International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health
Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
Viale delle terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy

and

IPFSAPH-Helpdesk@fao.org